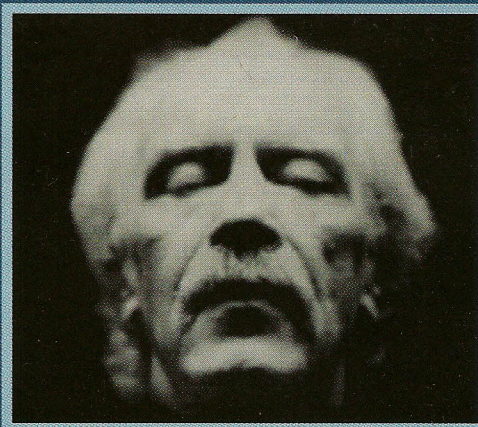


# JOHN CARPENTER



John Carpenter has earned a reputation as one of fantastique cinema's most respected and popular filmmakers thanks to an eclectic, important and influential body of work characterised by strong storytelling, lush Panavision photography, groovy self-composed synthesiser scores and Kurt Russell.

Carpenter's first legitimate feature was the student film turned cult item *Dark Star* (1974), a sci-fi comedy in which a malfunctioning sentient bomb menaces a bunch of astronauts.

Inspired by the films of Howard Hawks and John Ford during his youth, the western archetype permeates Carpenter's films, yet to this day he has never made one. Rather, he has adapted the genre to accommodate elements like urban violence (*Assault on Precinct 13*), dystopian futures (*Escape from New*

telemovie *Elvis* (1979), JC reunited with the former Disney star for *Escape from New York* (1981), which gave the actor one of his best roles to date as the eye-patched mercenary Snake Plissken. As Johnny Depp is to Tim Burton so Russell was to Carpenter, subsequently starring as the wiseass hero of *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986), the taciturn R.J. MacReady in *The Thing* (1982) and reprising Snake in the belated – and rubbish – sequel *Escape from L.A.* (1996).

In 1982, the same year that *E.T.* was breaking people's hearts, Carpenter's visceral remake of Howard Hawks's *The Thing from Another World* was tearing them out. *Starman* (1984) brought a more benign alien visitor to Earth in the form of Jeff Bridges, and is one of Carpenter's most emotionally rich and dramatic films. Together with *The Thing*, the

**"Movies are pieces of film stuck together in a certain rhythm, an absolute beat, like a musical composition. The rhythm you create affects the audience." – John Carpenter**

*York, Ghosts of Mars*) and horror icons (*Vampires*).

Carpenter's signature film – and his best – is the seminal *Halloween* (1978), which introduced both Jamie Lee Curtis and the ultimate boogeyman in the masked killer Michael Myers. The film also created the stalker movie template and remains more technically proficient and frightening than any of the imitators and sequels that followed in its wake. Widescreen horror has never been better (especially on Blu-ray disc) and neither has Carpenter, although his next film *The Fog* (1980) was a worthy follow-up and remains a superior tale of ghostly pirates over Disney's bloated 'Caribbean franchise.

JC's further forays into the macabre include adapting Stephen King's killer car novel *Christine* (1983), referencing Qatormass in *Prince of Darkness* (1987) and Lovecraft in *In the Mouth of Madness* (1994), and casting Jimmy Woods as a deranged vampire slayer in the mean-spirited *Vampires* (1998).

Having cast Kurt Russell as The King in his

alien invasion satire *They Live* (1988) remains one of Carpenter's finest forays into science fiction. And then there's his *Village of the Damned* remake (1995); if *The Thing* is one of the best remakes of a b&w sci-fi classic, then VOD is one of the worst.

And let's not forget the Chevy Chase comedy *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992), which ironically went unseen by many.

Carpenter hasn't exactly been prolific since his last cinema-released feature, 2001's *Ghosts of Mars*, another revision of *Rio Bravo* this time set on the red planet. In the interim he's contributed a pair of episodes to the *Masters of Horror* Pay TV series: the high concept *Cigarette Burns* and the deplorable *Pro-Life*, the latter certainly casting doubt on his current status as a 'Master'.

With a number of new film projects continuing to be announced but never realised, at the time of writing Carpenter is set to return to the director's chair for the institutional ghost story *The Ward*. Or is he?

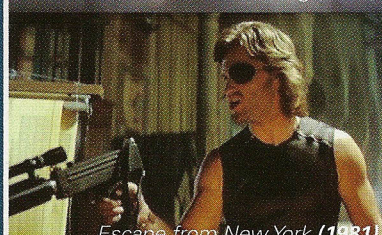
## Career Highlights



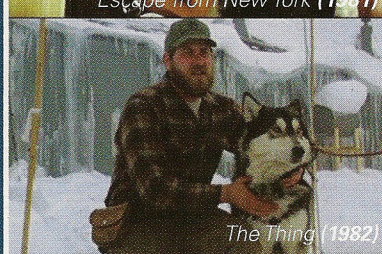
*Halloween* (1978)



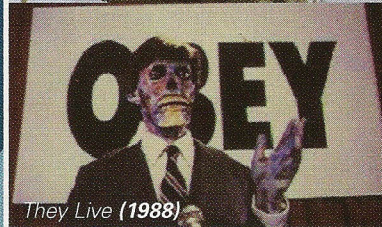
*The Fog* (1980)



*Escape from New York* (1981)



*The Thing* (1982)



*They Live* (1988)